

THE CULTIVATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND GENERAL SUPPORT
FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS PROGRAMS: SOME PRACTICAL SUG-
GESTIONS

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In the proceedings for both the first and second developmental conferences on forensics, a number of issues were raised regarding administrative support or lack thereof for forensic programs. Six of the topics discussed in those pre-

ceedings are appropriate to the focus of this paper regarding administrative support and publicity: (1) Administrative support needs to be cultivated through enhanced awareness of forensic programs and their benefits for students (McBath, 13; Parson, 42); (2) the forensic community must work together to promote the activity (Parson, 48); (3) professional organizations must serve their members in a variety of ways (Parson, 39); (4) additional research should be done to determine the levels of support for forensic activities that currently exist among chief administrative officials (McBath, 13, 19); (5) increased attention must be given to programs that cultivate support for forensics at the "grass roots" (i.e., elementary) level (McBath, 19; Parson, 39); and (6) forensic educators need to do a better job of helping administrators to understand the unique "creative" dimension of the activity (Parson, 95).

Each of these areas reflected the need for an additional developmental conference, as was called for in the first conference (McBath, 46), to provide a forum for the discussion of aspects unique to individual events programs. This paper will address each of these areas and provide suggestions in the form of resolutions for the attention of the work group on Administrative Support/Publicity.

AREAS OF CONCERN THE NEED FOR PUBLIC AWARENESS

Most would agree that there is a need to let the public, and specifically administrators, know about good things that happen to forensic teams. Coaches are quick to spread the news about how well their teams are doing and the number of trophies won. However, less time is spent by forensic coaches informing administrators, in specific terms, how their programs are contributing to the positive reputation of their particular institutions. The majority of the coach's time is not spent with administrators, but with students and coaches from his/her institution or those on "the circuit." Clearly, the present focus of the activity is on competition. A product of this focus is the development of a distinct culture with norms, values, and networks. Sometimes this culture is so complex that those who are a part of it cannot describe it to outsiders. The jargon of individual events' tournaments can be confusing. For example, terminology such as "breaking," "DE," "squirrel judges;" and procedures such as "dropping low rankings and ratings not necessarily on the same ballot," "seeding," and varying "sweepstakes computations" might cause those unfamiliar with the activity to prefer to remain "unenlightened." This inward focus can often create misunderstandings between those who participate in the competition and those only observe it from "the outside." Unfortunately, most administrators (and certainly the general public) are "the outsiders." The directors of individual events programs perpetuate the problem by not informing/including administrators in those aspects of their programs that best justify their existence on college and university campuses. Due to the excessively

long tournament schedule, coaches feel, perhaps justifiably, that they don't have enough time for the things they must do just to teach and keep the team going. The idea of spending time doing public performances or speaking to groups outside of their campus setting is simply considered out of the question. This lack of attention to providing more opportunities for public understanding and appreciation seems to be as apparent today as it was when the first developmental conference was held. Yet, the problem continues to exist.

THE NEED FOR CONSISTENCY IN PROMOTING NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

A second area of concern relates to a lack of consistency in the promotion of national tournaments. Many administrators do not understand why there is more than one "national tournament." In most other extra-curricular collegiate activities, there are divisions or levels of competition. The forensic community has chosen not to label its national tournaments according to differing enrollment levels. However, this makes the job of establishing levels of importance more difficult for the director of individual events who must justify travel to more than one national tournament when budgets are scrutinized for duplication and waste. The forensic community has been slow to deal with this problem because of the various national groups that seek to attract members/subscribers to their ranks. Members of the AFA and NFA debate regularly on the merits and importance of their respective national tournaments. The honoraries (Pi Kappa Delta, Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha, Phi Rho Pi) continue their recruitment of new chapters. However, there are members of the AFA and NFA who would claim that the national tournaments held by the honoraries are not as "important" as either the NIET or IE Nationals. They have made conscious decisions not to attend the national tournaments of their honoraries for this reason alone. It would seem that establishing some coordination or levels of national competition would make the public relations efforts and justification arguments for directors of individual events programs more compelling.

THE NEED FOR A PROMOTIONAL PACKAGE FOR FORENSIC DIRECTORS

Another problem facing new and more experienced forensic coaches alike is the absence of any uniform system or guide for creating a successful public relations program for an individual events program. Often times, both experienced and beginning IE coaches lack the academic training in public relations and spend valuable hours "re-inventing the wheel" when it comes to writing press releases or letters to various media groups in their areas.

As a result, these coaches simply ignore the potential support that could be generated for their programs if only information about their team and competitive and educational efforts were disseminated to the media. Another dimension of the problem relates to the manner in which press releases are writ-

ten. If a uniform system of reporting were developed, perhaps the media would be more receptive to more frequent reporting of forensic events.

THE NEED FOR INCREASED RESEARCH ACTIVITY

INVOLVING TOP-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS

In general, forensic educators do not do a good job of finding out what value administrators see in forensic programs and why some schools don't have individual events programs. Quite blindly, we assume that everyone sees a value in having good communication skills. Yet, many administrators have not had academic training in speech communication and see the activity as a high-cost, low enrollment program. Unlike athletic programs which have a long-standing tradition at most institutions, individual events programs are much less visible to administrators. Directing the attention of administrators to individual events programs could be helpful in identifying ways in which these programs could benefit the university in the areas of recruitment of student and faculty, scholarship or financial support, and general enhancement of the schools image in the state, region, or nation.

THE NEED FOR VISIBILITY AT THE "GRASS ROOTS" LEVEL

We have failed to create visibility for forensic programs at the grass-roots levels with parents by not giving elementary school-aged children the choice to participate in forensics. By our absence at this level, we virtually deny individual events equal status with other activities (i.e., athletics). There are very few programs nationally that are designed to promote individual events in the primary or intermediate grades. Forensic educators have overlooked the low level of instruction in the area of public speaking skills experienced by the vast majority of elementary teachers. Very little information is included in language arts textbooks emphasizing public speaking or oral interpretation skills. Children who show an aptitude for speaking out are encouraged to "be quiet." Those who persist are often stigmatized rather than idolized by the other children. If children can see the same kinds of social benefits coming from forensics as they do from athletics, they may be more apt to participate. Once legitimized, increased publicity and support may follow.

THE NEED FOR INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

OF FORENSICS BY ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators generally have been skeptical of forensic educators who suggest that the activity is so demanding that time for scholarly activity is precluded. Because many coaches have published articles or presented papers, administrators have viewed this argument regarding the inability to pursue scholarly activity as defensiveness on the part of the forensic coach. What administrators sometimes overlook is the issue of quality versus quantity. Having one research project annually, along with coaching, could be considered as "steady" scholarship. The need to educate administrators regarding the impact of the forensic activity on the coach's time is necessary in order to enhance the

image of the activity and its legitimate role as a dimension of the academic program. Coaching is actually a "creative" hybrid of teaching and scholarship. Helping administrators to understand this unique dimension of forensics could enhance the argument being raised by members of the forensic community regarding the impact of coaching on the time available to do research or to pursue any scholarly activity.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Forensic educators must seek avenues for bringing individual events to the public in a way that demonstrates the significant impact the activity has on the individuals involved.

Individual events are well-suited to public performances. Due to the singular nature of the performance (i.e., the students read or speak alone or with one other person), a variety of events can be showcased at any given time. Audiences can appreciate the interpretation of literature or the presentation of an original point of view. Making these events public enables administrators to see added benefits for their institutions. For example, audience members are supportive, or must be at least interested, in the forensic program sponsoring the event or else they wouldn't be present. These audience members may be potential scholarship donors or recruiters for the institution.

Administrators like to visit with those who support programs. By being given an opportunity to speak, or simply to be present at such events, administrators can become more aware of the benefits of individual events programs. Even for those schools that do not conduct such programs, inviting a university official to be present at the opening session or final awards ceremony can be one way to promote the forensic program.

2. Levels of "national competition in individual events should be established to enhance the overall image of the activity.

While most would decry the need to establish levels of competition, there is something to be said for this practice. The ability of forensic directors to persuade their administrators to allow them to travel to more than one national tournament is often in direct proportion to the success of the team. Some schools attend up to four national individual events tournaments every spring. Which winner of an individual event deserves the most recognition? Which winner would an administrator be most willing to support financially? When the administrator asks the director which national tournament is the "most important," or which national tournament other schools in the state or region are attending, the director is often left without a clear-cut position. The forensic community would do well to work together to promote support for all of the national tournaments. Perhaps the analogy to the PGA golf tour or the Grand Slam for tennis might well be studied to determine if such a format could be used to create a system whereby an overall nine individual events champion could be named based upon consistency at all or several national

tournaments. Justifying attendance at national individual events tournaments might be easier if administrators understood that there was an overall goal or purpose involved.

3. The Council of Forensic Organizations should sponsor the creation of a publicity package to be sent to every Director of Forensics for use in promoting the activity.

The creation of a publicity package is important if the activity is ever to increase its visibility with administrators and the general public. Such a publicity package could include sample press releases for tournament results, announcing special programs, highlighting a season, or inviting new students to attend a meeting of the speech team. The use of these models would save the Director of Forensics a great deal of time. In addition, Public Service Announcements for radio and television could be created informing the public of the varied activities involved in forensics and how through participation, students gain important skills that will serve them for a lifetime. Lists of likely contacts and how to approach media representatives could also be useful for coaches who have never been trained for work in public relations.

4. Increased research activity in the assessment of levels of administrative support for individual events programs must be pursued.

Too often, administrators have been uninformed about the levels of support being given to forensic programs. Most administrators know if their institution has a forensic program. However, even the most concerned chief administrators probably cannot talk about their forensic program beyond the identity of the head coach or some of its past successes. In addition, little if any research has explored the personal assessments these administrators have about forensics. Perhaps, if forensic coaches knew how their administrators felt about their programs, they could do a better job of communicating about levels of support.

5. The forensic community should increase its attention in the area of creating and promoting programs for elementary school children.

In some states, students in junior high school can compete in individual events. However, the attention paid to children in elementary school is virtually non-existent. By denying the opportunity for children to enter the activity at the same time as they are learning to hit the ball, catch the pass, or run the mile, we put our activity at a disadvantage. Parents often look for non-athletic alternatives for their children. However, by the time the alternatives are available, the children have already established their attitudes about these options. The result has been that fewer children participate in forensics than in athletics. The link to parental support is clear. If the parents believe that their child will experience fewer scholarship opportunities because he or she is not in athletics, those parents may not allow their child the option of choosing forensics. A specific case comes to mind of a boy who was an exceptional

public speaker. He was clearly one of the best beginners on the team. However, he was not allowed to continue because his father believed that by playing hockey his chances for getting a scholarship outweighed the personal benefits and satisfaction the son experienced by being on the speech team. By creating forensic programs for elementary children and establishing a "grass roots" level of support for the activity, perhaps increased monetary support in the form of scholarships would also increase.

A program recently created in Fargo, North Dakota, entitled KIDSPEAK, gives support to the claim that children in the primary grades can understand the basic concepts associated with forensics and can demonstrate those skills necessary to speak or read in public. One hundred and fifty children in grades three through six participated in a six-month program where basic public speaking, oral reading, creative expression and storytelling, informative and persuasive speaking, argumentation and debate, and communication etiquette were taught. These children, along with their parents, evaluated the experience positively and informal interviews with the regular teachers of these children suggested that these children were more effective in their class presentations as a result of their participation in the program. The 4-H network is another avenue the forensic community might pursue to develop and promote the activity in the early stages of a child's education.

6. Administrators should be shown, at first hand, the dimensions of directing an individual events program.

Administrators are often simply uninformed about the various dimensions of coaching individual events. They are without a frame of reference from which to draw conclusions. Most coaches are intimidated by the thought of sitting down with the chief administrative official and discussing the strengths of their programs. In addition, members of the faculty need to be informed about what individual events' speakers are working on in preparation for competition.

Interaction between faculty who serve as "peer evaluators" on departmental and college promotion committees and the administrators who ultimately evaluate the recommendations of these committees can only help the IE coaches who must teach and coach and serve their respective campuses.

SUMMARY

The forensic community has overcome many hurdles in its efforts to improve the environment in which students compete and faculty members coach. Unfortunately, by not promoting the activity to the general public and administrators, competing for attention at the national level, failing to help the beginning coach with basic promotional materials, ignoring the perceptions of collegiate administrators in our research efforts, missing an opportunity for the cultivation of support at the grass roots level, and limiting administrators' awareness of the creative aspects of the activity, we have kept our "light under

a basket." It is time that directors of individual events programs become stronger advocates for the activity and "shine" for both the general public and administrators to see. Only then will the forensic community begin to see the goals of the first two developmental conferences become reality.

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